

CRS Report for Congress

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Membership of the 109th Congress: A Profile

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Summary

This report presents a profile of the membership of the 109th Congress. Statistical information is included on selected characteristics of Members, including data on party affiliation, average age and length of service, occupation, religious affiliation, female and minority Members, foreign-born Members, and military service.

Currently, in the House of Representatives, there are 231 Republicans (including the Resident Commissioner), 206 Democrats (including four Delegates), and one Independent, who is aligned with the Democrats. The Senate has 55 Republicans, 44 Democrats, and one Independent, who is aligned with the Democrats.

The average age of Members of both houses, at the convening of the 109th Congress, was 56 years; of Representatives, 55 years; and of Senators, 60 years. The overwhelming majority of Members has a college education. The dominant profession of Members continues to be law, followed by public service/politics and business.

Protestants collectively constitute the majority religious affiliation of Members. Roman Catholics account for the largest single religious denomination, and numerous other affiliations are represented.

The average length of service in the House, at the beginning of the Congress, was about 9.3 years (slightly over 4.5 terms); in the Senate, 12.1 years (two terms).

A record number of 85 women serve in the 109th Congress: 71 in the House, 14 in the Senate. An unprecedented number of black Members (43) are also serving. There are 42 black Members in the House, including two Delegates, and one in the Senate. In addition, there is a record 30 Hispanic Members serving: 26 in the House, including the Resident Commissioner, and three in the Senate. Eight Members (five Representatives, one Delegate, and two Senators) are Asian, Indian American (Asian), or Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander. There is one American Indian (Native American), who serves in the House.

This report will be revised at the commencement of the 110th Congress.

The 109th Congress: A Profile¹

Congress is composed of 540 individuals from the 50 states, as well as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and American Samoa. This count assumes that no seat is temporarily vacant.² The following is a profile of the 109th Congress.

Party Breakdown

In the 109th Congress, the current party breakdown in the House is 231 Republicans (including the Resident Commissioner), 206 Democrats (including four Delegates), and one Independent who is aligned with the Democrats. The Senate has 55 Republicans, 44 Democrats, and one Independent who is aligned with the Democrats.

Age

The average age of Senators in the 109th Congress is 60.4 years, the oldest in history.³ The average age of Representatives is 55 (54.99) years, likely the oldest in history.⁴ The average age of both houses is 56 (55.98) years.

Representatives must be at least 25 years old when they take office. The youngest Representative, as well as youngest Member of Congress, is Patrick McHenry (R-NC), 30. The oldest Representative is Ralph Hall (R-TX), 82.

Senators must be at least 30 years old when they take office. The youngest Senator is Senator John Sununu (R-NH), who is 41 and a former Member of the House. The oldest Senator, as well as the oldest current Member of Congress, is Robert C. Byrd (D-WV), 88.

¹ For background information on earlier Congresses, please refer to CRS Report RS21379, *Membership of the 108th Congress: A Profile*, by Mildred Amer; CRS Report RS20760, *Membership of the 107th Congress: A Profile*, by Mildred Amer; CRS Report RS20013, *Membership of the 106th Congress: A Profile*, by Mildred Amer; CRS Report RL30378, *Black Members of the United States Congress: 1789-2004*, by Mildred Amer; CRS Report RL30261, *Women in the United States Congress: 1917-2004*, by Mildred Amer; and CRS Report 97-398, *Asian Pacific Americans in the United States Congress*, by Lorraine Tong.

² Currently, there are two vacancies in the House. Since 1789, 11,756 individuals (not including Delegates and Resident Commissioners) have served in Congress: 9,871 only in the House, 1,243 only in the Senate, and 642 in both houses.

³ Congressional Quarterly, Inc, "109th Congress: Statistically Speaking," *CQ Today*, vol. 40, no. 155, Nov. 4, 2004, p. 62, supplemented by CRS.

⁴ Ibid. The complete CRS records on the ages of Members of the House begin in 1907, the 60th Congress.

Occupations⁵

As has been true in previous Congresses, law is the dominant profession followed for the first time by public service/politics and then business.⁶ Other professions practiced by a significant number of Members include education and agriculture. A closer look at the prior occupations of Members of the 109th Congress also shows:

- 13 medical doctors (including a psychiatrist), three dentists, three nurses, two veterinarians, two psychologists, an optometrist, and one pharmacist;
- six ministers;
- 35 mayors, 10 state governors, nine lieutenant governors (including two Delegates), two state first ladies (one of whom was also the first lady of the United States), and one territorial first lady;
- three former cabinet secretaries, a former Secretary of the Navy, a former deputy administrator in the Department of Veterans' Affairs, a former deputy assistant Secretary of State, a former ambassador, three state supreme court justices, and a federal judge;
- 275 (236 in the House and 39 in the Senate) former state legislators;⁷
- 109 congressional staffers (including 11 congressional pages), 15 White House staffers or fellows, several former executive branch employees, and a former parliamentary aide in the British House of Commons;
- four sheriffs, four police officers (including a Capitol policeman), two state troopers, two volunteer firemen, two probation officers, and a border patrol chief;
- two FBI agents, one CIA agent, and one CIA attache;
- two physicists, two chemists, a biomedical researcher, a biomedical engineer, a geologist, and a microbiologist;
- six Peace Corps volunteers;

⁵ The professions described here are not necessarily the ones practiced by Members immediately prior to entering Congress.

⁶ Congressional Quarterly, Inc, "109th Congress: Statistically Speaking," p. 62. In the overwhelming majority of previous Congresses, business has followed law as the dominant occupation of Members. In the 109th Congress, 218 Members (160 Representatives, 58 Senators) list their occupation as law; 195 Members (163 Representatives, 32 Senators) list public service/politics, and 193 Members (163 Representatives, 30 Senators) list business. Members often list more than one profession when surveyed by Congressional Quarterly, Inc.

⁷ National Conference of State Legislators, "Former State Legislators in the 109th Congress," internal report made available to CRS.

- three radio broadcasters, two radio talk show hosts, a television sportscaster, a television reporter, a television talk show host, and a motivational speaker;
- six accountants;
- a commercial airline pilot, a corporate pilot, and an astronaut;
- a professional magician, a semi-professional musician, a major league baseball player, a major league football player (who was also a college football coach), a florist, a librarian; and
- two vintners, two auctioneers, two bank tellers, a furniture salesman, a steelworker, a carpenter, an ironworker, a paper mill worker, a cement plant worker, a meat cutter, a river boat captain, a taxicab driver, a toll booth collector, a hotel clerk, a hotel bellhop, a fruit orchard worker, a race track blacksmith, and a “jackeroo” (cowboy) on a sheep-cattle ranch.

Education

As has been true in previous Congresses, the Members of the 109th Congress are well educated. At least 396 Members of the House and 97 Senators hold bachelor’s degrees; 120 Members of the House and 19 Senators have master’s degrees; 170 Members of the House and 58 Senators hold law degrees; 20 Members of the House have doctoral degrees; and 14 Members of the House and four Senators hold medical degrees.⁸

In addition, there are three graduates of the U.S. Military Academy, two in the House and one in the Senate; one Senator is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy; one Representative (a woman) is a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy; five Representatives and three Senators were Rhodes Scholars; one Representative was a Fulbright Scholar, and one was a Marshall Scholar.

Congressional Service⁹

The average length of service of Members of the House at the beginning of the 109th Congress was 9.3 years (about 4.5 terms). Representatives are elected for two-year terms. Representative John Dingell (D-MI), the dean of the House, has the longest consecutive service of any Member of the 109th Congress (50 years). He began serving on December 13, 1955.

The average length of service of Members of the Senate at the beginning of the 109th Congress was 12.1 years (two terms). Senators are elected for six-year terms. Senator

⁸ Nine Representatives, two Senators, and one Delegate have an M.D. degree; three Representatives have a D.D.S. (doctor of dental surgery) degree; two Senators have a D.V.M. (doctor of veterinary medicine) degree; and one Representative has an O.D. (doctor of optometry) degree.

⁹ For additional information, see CRS Report RL32648, *Average Years of Service for Members of the Senate and House of Representatives, First - 108th Congress*, by Mildred Amer.

Robert C. Byrd (D-WV) has served longer (47 years) than any other incumbent Member of the Senate.¹⁰ His service began on January 3, 1959. Senator Ted Stevens (R-AK), the Senate President pro tempore, is the current Republican Senator with the longest Senate service (37 years). He has been a Member of the Senate since December 24, 1968.

Religion¹¹

Most Members of the 109th Congress cite a specific religious affiliation. Protestants (Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and others) collectively constitute the majority religious affiliation of Members. However, Roman Catholics account for the largest single religious denomination. Other affiliations, such as Greek Orthodox, Jewish, Christian Scientist, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon), make up the balance.

Female and Minority Members

Female Members. More women, 85, serve in the 109th Congress than have in any prior Congress. Seventy-one in the House and 14 in the Senate. Of the 71 women in the House, 46 are Democrats, including three Delegates, and 25 are Republicans. In the Senate, nine women are Democrats; five are Republicans.

Black Members. A record number (43) of black Members are serving, 42 in the House, one in the Senate. All are Democrats, including two Delegates. Fourteen black women serve in the House, including the two Delegates. Senator Barack Obama (D-IL) is the first male, black Democrat to serve in the Senate.

Hispanic Members. The 30 Hispanic Members of the 109th Congress are the largest number ever to have served in a single Congress.¹² Twenty-seven serve in the House and three in the Senate. Of the Members of the House, 21 are Democrats, six are Republicans (including the Resident Commissioner), and seven are women. The Hispanic Senators are men, two Democrats and one Republican.

There are two sets of Hispanic Members who are brothers, and one set who are sisters. Mario and Lincoln Diaz-Balart, Republicans from Florida, serve in the House. Ken Salazar (D-CO) serves in the Senate, and his brother, John Salazar (D-CO), serves in the House. Linda and Loretta Sanchez, Democrats from California, serve in the House.¹³

¹⁰ Note that 52 Sens. in the 109th Congress have previously served in the House.

¹¹ Congressional Quarterly, Inc., “Religions in the 109th,” *CQ Today*, vol. 40, no. 155, Nov. 4, 2004, p. 632.

¹² This number includes three of the four Members of the House who are of Portuguese decent and belong to the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. The other Member is not included because he does not belong to the Hispanic Caucus.

¹³ Note that brothers Sen. Carl Levin (D-MI), and Rep. Sander Levin (D-MI) also serve in the 108th Congress as well as Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and his son Rep. Patrick Kennedy (D-RI).

Asian Pacific Americans. Eight Members are of Asian or Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander heritage. Six serve in the House, five Democrats (including a Delegate) and one Republican. Two, both Democrats, serve in the Senate. Of those serving in the House, one is a Delegate, one is African American with Filipino heritage, and one is Indian American (Asian).

American Indians. There is one American Indian (Native American) Member of the 109th Congress, who is a Republican Member of the House.

Foreign Born¹⁴

Nine Representatives and one Senator were born outside the United States. Their places of birth include Cuba, Hungary, Taiwan, Japan, Pakistan, Canada, and the Netherlands.

Military Service

According to the Military Officers Association of America, there are 139 Members of the 109th Congress who have had some form of military service.¹⁵ The House has 109; the Senate 30. They have served in World War II, the Korean War, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, and Kosovo, and during times of peace, as well as in the Reserves and the National Guard. As noted above, one Senator is a former Secretary of the Navy.

The number of veterans in the 109th Congress is 13 fewer than the 108th Congress and 14 fewer than in the 107th Congress showing the recent trend of a steady decline in the number of Members who have served in the military. This may be attributed in part to the end of the Selective Service System draft in 1973.

¹⁴ “Born Abroad,” *CQ Today*, July 1, 2005, p. 10, supplemented by CRS.

¹⁵ Military Officers Association of America, “Diminished Veterans’ Presence in Congress,” [http://www.moaa.org/Legislative/Handbook/FactSheets/LegisTips/legislative_tips_5.asp].